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December 13, 1978

Dear Mr. Kostmayer:

Thank you for your letter of December 1, 1978, in which you request information about the U.S. response to the Guyana tragedy. As you know, the United States Government continues to be involved in this tragic episode and is investigating various aspects of the situation. Nevertheless, I wanted to give you an early response to the questions you have raised concerning this unprecedented matter.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life. As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle; and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time.

The Honorable
Peter H. Kostmayer,
House of Representatives.

DEPT. OF STATE A/CDC/MR
DATE
RELEASE DENIED
EXEMPTIONS
E.O. or FOI EXEMPTIONS

The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the U.S. Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially less than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to appropriate congressional committees on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the U.S. Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell. His telephone is 632-8562.

Sincerely,

DB/GW

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

ARA/PPC:JSchreiber:mbh #0164-2220

Clearances: Inter-Agency
ARA:GLister
ARA:JBushnell
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PETER H. KOSTMAYER
5TH DISTRICT, PENNSYLVANIA

P780164-2220

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

December 1. 1978

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ACTION
is assigned to
APA

Dear Doug:

I realize that it will be some time before the final cost of identifying and recovering the Jonestown suicide victims can be determined.

However, as soon as these final figures do become available, I would very much appreciate it if you would forward them on to me. I am particularly interested in seeing a breakdown of the specific costs involved in the recovery mission.

Thank you for your time and help.

Sincerely,

Mr. Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary for
Congressional Relations
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

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(1) PETER H. KOSTMAYER